

# Dr M on ship registration

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KUALA LUMPUR: Ships should be registered in their own countries so that it will be easier to identify the ownership and responsibility in case of any mishap, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said the current practice of one-ship companies which registered their vessels in third countries like Liberia and Panama made it difficult to determine ownership.

"These companies will have only one ship, claiming it to be their only asset. They would use this as an excuse to avoid

paying for any damages or compensation in the event of a mishap" he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters at the Chinese New Year open house of Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Deng.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the collision of two ships in the Andaman Sea, near the entrance of the Malacca Straits, on Thursday.

The 255,312-tonne *Maersk Navigator* was carrying about two million barrels of oil when it collided with the 96,545-tonne unladen tanker *Sanko Honour*, raising fears of a major environmental disaster.

24 JAN 1993  
Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would forward this proposal (to have ships registered in their own countries) at the forthcoming meeting between the littoral states Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.

The meeting scheduled for June is to find means to keep the Malacca straits free of pollution, accidents and pirates.

Law told reporters the winds from the north were causing the stricken ship and the oil slick to drift westwards, away from Malaysian shores.

"This is good news for us. But we are not going to relax. I have instructed the Department of Environment to monitor closely any changes."